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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the single 2001 issue of a journal highlighting notable after-school programs, many funded by 21st Century Community Learning Center grants, and the school-community collaboration they entail. Articles in this issue on literacy are: (1) "Literacy and Afterschool: A Perfect Fit," focusing on literacy programs for limited English speaking children; (2) "Department of Education Assistant Secretary Pushes Literacy," providing excerpts from an interview with Susan B. Neuman after being confirmed Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education; (3) "Literacy: The Centerpiece of Afterschool," describing a program offering homework help, recreational enrichment, and individualized reading programs; (4) "Community Schools Work with Families," describing the literacy activities of a community school; (5) "Middle School Initiative Targets Literacy," describing after-school programs at three middle school centers offering individualized reading help; and (6) "Literacy efforts Boost Scores, Morale," focusing on the impact of an after-school program concentrating on building literacy and mathematics skills and English as a second language. (KB)

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Making Afterschool Count:
Communities & Schools Working Together, 2001

Andrea Warren and Ann Yost

Volume 4, Number 1

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CHARLES STEWART MOTT FOUNDATION

Literacy and afterschool: A perfect fit

By ANDREA WARREN

When Ed Kozol and his wife, Maurine, are at their local grocery store in Garden City, Kansas, they typically hear other shoppers speaking Vietnamese, Laotian, Spanish or several of its dialects. Their checkout clerk might be from Costa Rica or El Salvador, and the bagger from Mexico or Guatemala.

The Kozols, who have lived in Garden City for six years, recognize such diversity as the norm for their adopted community. A town with 25,000 residents in the early 1990s, Garden City began attracting immigrants seeking jobs in the area's expansive packing plants, swelling its population to 37,000 by the year 2000.

The influx of children who cannot speak English and who, in many instances, are unable to read or write their native

Encouraging children to read is a key to good literacy skills.

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For more information

about the findings of the National Reading Panel (NRP), go to the National Institute for Child Health and Development's Web site at: www.nichd.nih.gov and click on publications to find the listing for the NRP.

You can access information reports about the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative at the Mott Foundation's redesigned Web site: www.mott.org.

Reading to children helps develop their interest in reading on their own.

languages, has presented a major challenge for Garden City educators.

"It's not uncommon for us to get new students who should be in fourth grade who have never been in school and know no English," said Kozol, who is the school district's coordinator for at-risk programs. "We've had as many as 17 different languages and dialects among our student body at one time. We routinely send home all correspondence in English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Laotian."

To address the problem of literacy, the district developed a multilingual curriculum to help students make the transition to English. To supplement what was happening in the classroom, reading and writing became an important component in the Garden City schools' summer and afterschool programs, funded through a grant from the federal government's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) initiative.

"We know that literacy is the key to these kids' futures," Kozol said. "We work hard on this, and, as a result, students' reading scores are coming up and will go higher."

"What they're accomplishing in Garden City is very impressive," said Marianne R. Kugler, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation's former liaison with the federal government on afterschool programs.[1] "They're incorporating the best educational information we can give them, and proving that, with the right approach, you can teach any child, including older and bilingual children, to read fluently in English."

New approaches

"Research shows that when students who have limited English proficiency participate in afterschool programs, they're much more likely to adopt English as their dominant language," said Adriana De Kanter, the U.S. Department of Education's (DOE) partnership liaison for academic improvement and demonstration programs.

To enhance this opportunity, experts agree, it's critical that programs like Garden City's incorporate teaching methods known to be most effective in the teaching of reading.

As a result of the findings of the National Reading Panel (NRP), commissioned

[1]Kugler, also a former program officer at the Mott Foundation, is now the interim dean of the School of Education and Human Services at the University of Michigan-Flint.

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by Congress to evaluate several decades of research on teaching reading skills, educators now know that chief among these methods is instruction in phonics. (See related article, Page 4.) But that finding comes with a caution.

"This is not the old-fashioned phonics worksheet used a generation ago," said Joe Conaty, director of academic improvement and demonstration programs for the DOE's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

"We know much more about this than we once did. The best approach to learning to read is giving systematic attention to sounds, learning to discriminate sound, understanding the relationship of sound and letters, and then getting lots of practice in decoding and reading, which includes the study of vocabulary."

Officially, such skills come under the headings of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency. Each is part of a complex whole that is critical for success in school and in life.

DOE is currently preparing "Reading First," a proposal developed by the Bush administration as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The proposal's goal is to improve the reading achievement of children in grades K-3 in classrooms around the country, using research-based instructional strategies identified by NRP.

"If these strategies could be used in classrooms across America, we'd see substantial improvements in children's reading scores," Conaty said. "But first we have to train teachers in how to use them. That's going to be a major target for us."

Estimates are that only 10 percent of elementary teachers have been trained to teach phonics. In an ideal world, Kugler said, teachers would have time to apply scientifically proven methods in the classroom, but in reality that's often not the case.

Supplementing classroom

"The 21st Century afterschool programs have always had a strong reading component," De Kanter said. "You may not have a reading specialist available after school, but you can teach community volunteers to help kids with their reading. We want to put our dollars into providing optimal training for these people."

Kugler noted that 95 percent of the government's afterschool programs, which currently reach 1.2 million American children, include a literacy component.

Children learn best when they have adults around them who expose them to language, help them with vocabulary, encourage and listen to them read, and give them one-on-one feedback when they practice their reading. Afterschool programs usually have a much better adult-to-student ratio than the classroom and so provide excellent opportunities for practice. Program materials are becoming increasingly available that assist in the teaching of phonemes and using the phonetic approach to teaching recommended by NRP.

That afterschool programs improve reading is supported by several major studies:

Learning to read

When the 1995 National Assessment of Educational Programs found that fewer than one-third of ninth-graders were proficient in reading, and only 2 percent to 5 percent of students read at advanced levels, alarm bells went off. Educators already knew that reading scores were down, and parental and classroom teacher concern up. Clearly, methods used to teach reading were getting a low grade.

In a search for solutions, Congress requested that the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development consult with the U.S. Department of Education to create a National Reading Panel (NRP), whose members were charged with reviewing the research on teaching children to read. In its two-year study, the NRP used rigorous scientific criteria to evaluate existing reading research.

- In Ohio, fourth-graders who had participated in afterschool programs exceeded proficiency standards in reading.
- In Palm Beach County, Florida, students who had participated in the 21st CCLC initiative's Out of School Consortium also increased their reading scores.
- In California, reading scores of ninth-grade students participating in the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program increased more than the scores of other California children. Students who had participated longest had even greater increases than the norm.

"We used to think that children from poverty situations had more difficulty learning to read," Kugler said. "Now we have plenty of research showing that all children, including low-income children, can learn when exposed to effective teaching methods. Even without formal teacher education, volunteers and staff working in these programs can boost children's literacy."

In afterschool programs, there are no tests, rules are relaxed and the emphasis is on fun, so children don't even realize how much they're learning, Kugler said.

"They're tired at the end of the school day, and they need something different. While playing a game, they'll be learning decoding skills and extending their vocabulary, but as far as they're concerned, they're just playing a game. They learn to read for pleasure, turning them into lifelong readers. If we can give children the skills necessary to read by the third grade, we know from research that their future progress is dramatically improved."

Conaty feels strongly that if a child cannot read, it's not the child's fault.

"It's because of inadequate instruction, and that child has been done a tremendous injustice," she said. "We now have the tools to teach all children to read, and we owe them that. Reading is the key to a successful life in America."

In Garden City, school personnel are intent on expanding students' opportunities by giving them that key. They look forward to additional sites, new programs, and more children participating in enrichment programs where literacy is a critical component.

"Last year in the elementary summer school, we had 600 students. This year we had 1,400," Kozol said.

"We now have programs in 14 of our 16 schools and we serve children in all grades. We hope we'll soon have 2,000 of our 7,000 students in our afterschool programs.

"What we're doing is very challenging, but also very exciting. The grants we've received to support our 21st Century afterschool and summer programs have given us the means to help a lot of people. It's made a dramatic impact. Many of our kids ... are becoming fluent in two languages. Because we're helping them succeed, they'll stay in school. In two to three years, we'll be graduating our first students from the program, and we're confident some of them will go on to college. This program is changing lives." ■

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Department of Education assistant secretary Pushes Literacy

Susan B. Neuman, Ed.D, is the newly confirmed assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education in the U.S. Department of Education. She most recently was a professor of education at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and director of UM's Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement.

Her areas of focus are beginning reading and writing, family literacy, and parental involvement. She is the author of several books on reading and literacy, and has been published widely on these topics in research journals. She began her career as an elementary school teacher and reading specialist.

Here are excerpts from the first interview she has given since being confirmed and sworn into office in July.

Q When did you become interested in afterschool programs?

A "When I was a professor at Temple University in Philadelphia, I did an extensive study on community and literacy. One conclusion of this study was that even though children may have excellent educational opportunities during the school day, many often went unsupervised after school and got into mischief. I recognized the incredible potential afterschool programs offered in providing a safe place for children, while

Susan B. Neuman

NRP findings endorse the teaching of phonics — the relationship of phonemes (units of sound) to the letters of the alphabet. Research shows that even preschoolers can learn to identify phonemes and how they relate to printed letters, and that this knowledge is the best predictor of how well children will learn to read when they enter school. NRP concluded that systematic phonics instruction should be part of every reading program, and that children also need the opportunity to practice reading, spelling and vocabulary — with time to read out loud as well as to themselves, and with feedback from adults.

The most important variable in teaching children to read is the approach used by teachers. Education systems face an enormous challenge in switching instruction to these recommended methods, as do schools of education that are preparing teachers for the classroom.

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21st CCLC initiative

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative was established by Congress in 1997 with a $40-million appropriation to award grants to rural and inner-city public schools, or consortia of such schools, to enable them to plan, implement, or expand projects that benefit the educational, health, social services, cultural and recreational needs of the community.

School-based learning centers can provide safe, drug-free, supervised and cost-effective afterschool, weekend or summer havens for children, youth and their families. Federal grants awarded under this program may be used to plan, implement or expand community learning centers.

extending their academic progress, which includes reading and literacy."

Q What are your objectives regarding reading and literacy?

A "One is that all of us who are interested in children's achievement — professionals, teachers, parents, community workers and faith-based community workers — must work together to integrate approaches we use in programs before school, during school and after school.

"Another is that we must implement proven strategies. This means focusing on results-based strategies, rather than practices that do not have strong research behind them.

"We also need an accountability mechanism to measure our progress. We have focused on activities in the past. We must instead focus on outcomes using research-based critical skills. These include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Accountability comes through actual results — how well children read and do on their reading scores."

Q How do children with special challenges fit into this?

A "Any child with special challenges, whether it's limited English proficiency, special education needs or other special needs, must have high-quality instruction available in reading and literacy. All children deserve this and we must provide it."

Q Please comment on the National Reading Panel and its importance to the teaching of reading in this country.

A "The NRP has identified the critical skills children need to learn to read. Panel members examined the research and concluded that phonemic awareness and phonics instruction cause reading improvement. This has not been said this strongly before. The NRP report also set standards for research on reading by establishing necessary criteria.

"The report tells us what is known now. Because we are continuing to learn about the science of reading, we will have a second and then a third report as new research results are reported."

Q How do you regard the potential of your new position?

A "I've talked for years about the importance of children's educational achievement, and now I have the opportunity to help achieve change. I'm very excited about the possibilities, in part because we have a President and First Lady truly committed to literacy and knowledgeable about literacy development." ■ —WARREN

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Literacy The centerpiece of afterschool

By ANN YOST

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The focus on literacy does not end at 2:10 p.m. when classes are dismissed from Union House Elementary School.

START (Students Today Achieving Results Tomorrow), a five-year-old afterschool program, offers homework help, recreational enrichment and individualized reading programs to some 375 students.

"Union House is a year-round school," START Program Director Katie Faulkner said. "Kids are here from 7 a.m. until 6 or 6:30 p.m."

Union House was one of the first area schools to develop an afterschool program, thanks to the commitment of Principal Dan Owens, Faulkner said. A federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) initiative grant provided more resources for the program, including the addition of classroom teachers.

Program instructors are college students, many from the neighborhood. START is funded primarily through the California Department of Education. But teachers who work with the children and with the program instructors have been provided through the 21st CCLC grant.

"Teachers and program staff get together and create all center activities and lessons based on the benchmarks and standards required by the state," Faulkner said. "The classroom teachers can bring so much to the experience. They know the kids and can target specifically what they need to work on."

Instruction during the afterschool hours looks different from school-day instruction.

"We come up with learning games that are fun and enriching and different from what the kids do during the school day," Faulkner said.

Leslie Fong and another instructional assistant work with eight children at a time with Reading Naturally materials, a curriculum purchased by the school.

"The children are referred to us by their classroom teachers," Fong said. "Usually they are in the bottom 25 percent of their classes. We work with each child for a half hour. They get a tape recorder and a printed story."

Story subjects include biographies of celebrities like Stevie Wonder and Bill Cosby or information on a subject of interest like spiders or car racing.

"We time them to see how much they can read in a minute," Fong said. "Then they listen to the story three times on a cassette recorder, read it to themselves, and are timed again. They like charting their progress on a big graph."

Reading Naturally supports the work teachers are doing with reading during the day.

"The kids like the rewards, too," Fong said. "Each time they finish a level, they get a little certificate. We send the stories

In 1998, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation entered into an unusual private-public partnership with the U.S. Department of Education to provide grants for training, leadership development, technical assistance, evaluation, policy and public awareness to support the initiative. Mott plans to invest $100 million over a multiyear period in these field-building efforts.

In December 2000, Congress approved an increase in this program to $851 million for the 2001 fiscal year. To date, there have been more than 900 federal grants made to support programs in more than 3,600 schools nationwide. That number is expected to grow to more than 7,000 in 2001.

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Early learning programs can start youngsters on the road to literacy.

home with them so they can read them to their families. We have seen definite improvement for each child."

Union House is located in a low-income area. As a result, said Melissa Marshall, START literacy coordinator, many children come to school unprepared for reading.

Marshall, who is also a kindergarten teacher, says kids often don't know their colors or shapes, letters and other basic information.

"They are starting out at a disadvantage. We're doing the best we can to bring them up to a higher literacy level."

Students in START work in the computer lab, creating Web sites and PowerPoint presentations. About 15 high school students regularly come in after school to work with the younger children.

"The high school kids are former Union House students," Marshall said. "They are from the neighborhood, and the younger kids love getting their attention. The older ones get community service hours credit for high school."

Marshall's role in START is to train the program instructors.

"We work on putting together lessons for the CEL [California Early Learning] program," she said.

"The theory behind the program is to find subjects the kids are interested in and build on them. For example, if we read a story about forest animals and the kids start asking questions, the program assistant brings in more books on the subject, the kids will write a story in class or sometimes develop a play."

Recently, students heard the song "Under the Sea" from "The Little Mermaid." That sparked interest in crabs and other sea life. They read books, painted a mural and learned a dance related to the song.

"The CEL program works on questioning strategies, listening skills and writing," Marshall said. "The kids ask questions and we let them lead us into learning."

Marshall said teacher attitude has changed dramatically since the afterschool program started.

"Five years ago, teachers were not at all receptive. They were wary of having people come into their classrooms after school. We had to build relationships with them. We were also careful to make certain that program leaders had their own materials and that they leave each room the way they found it.

"Now the teachers love the program. I get tears in my eyes, when I think about it. They come to us to ask us to work on specific areas with a child. The kids are coming to class with their homework done and their work is improving. The teachers can see that this is helping the kids to learn."

Faulkner said: "The key to a successful program is the staff. We have a principal who supports this program and program leaders who want to work with kids and want to be teachers." □

Community schools work with families

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Last spring children from the John A. Johnson Achievement Plus Elementary School planted seeds. For some, this was the first time they had done that.

"We read books about seeds, vegetables and flowers," said Terri Wilson, extended-day learning coordinator for the school. "And we wrote journals. They observed their seeds every day and recorded their observations. The older kids, fourth through sixth grade, did experiments with their seeds, such as observing what happens when you use fertilizer on them and what happens when you do not."

Students from Daytons Bluff, another Achievement Plus elementary school, studied insects with an entomologist and created a community quilt designed to tell a story about themselves and their neighborhood.

The quilt includes representations of their houses and includes a river running through the middle of it, just as there is a river in their community, Wilson said. They wrote poems describing themselves and the poems are written on squares of the quilt.

Lashawnda
Pretty, Energetic
Sibling of Latimber, Latoya, Stephanie, Alyssa,
Billy, Antwan, Ken and Kenwan
Lover of TV and tag
Who fears tests and math homework
Who would like to see my community be cleaner.

Samantha
Angry, Happy
Sibling of Cindy, Crystal, Koren and Priscilla
Lover of math and kickball
Who fears snakes and tigers
Who would like to see people get along.

Jerrika Deschene and Megan Bergman complete an activity.

"Our literacy efforts ... are geared to supporting the work the child is doing in the classroom. Our focus is on individualized and small group tutoring."

—Andrew Collins

The Achievement Plus initiative, supported by a federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative grant, is tackling school reform, community schools and standards-based learning. Literacy improvement is one of the primary targets.

In 1997, the city of St. Paul, the school district, Ramsey County and the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation created Achievement Plus to improve academic achievement by removing barriers to learning. The initiative, under way in three elementary schools, provides improved instruction, extended learning opportunities and learning supports for students and families.

"These communities are underserved and in need of assistance," said Andrew Collins, director of extended learning for Achievement Plus, which has about 26 community partners. "We believe in bringing the community into the schools and taking the kids into the community."

In the fall of 2000, the Johnson Elementary School opened in a former high school that had been used for storage in recent years. The building required extensive renovation and now includes a branch of the YMCA, which is one of the program's community partners.

Johnson's extended-learning program includes before and afterschool, summer, and evening events. Family literacy nights are held monthly.

During the first year, evaluators noted that while attendance was up 30 percent because of the programs, there was no clear link between attendance and academic improvement.

Raymond Guerra with parent volunteer, Tammy Meier.

The partners in Achievement Plus deduced that the before and afterschool programs did not contain enough connection to the regular curriculum. A greater commitment from the school district was sought and attained and other stratagems, such as literacy coaches and stepped-up training of teachers, college students and

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"Our literacy efforts ... are geared to supporting the work the child is doing in the classroom. Our focus is on individualized and small group tutoring," Collins said.

"We've been evolving for four years and are starting to make a huge connection with school-day curriculum. We communicate with the classroom teachers and use the same themes they have used. Design coaches and literacy coordinators from the schools are now working with teachers and afterschool staff to integrate the techniques and practices of the school-day literacy program into the extended hours. This year we are planning to give the kids life experiences, as well as homework help."

Bringing the knowledge and resources of the daytime and afterschool staff together can be a challenge.

"Allowing program coordinators, design coaches and teachers to have a voice in how this transition from school day to afterschool is developed sounds easy, but it is not," Collins said.

"We have started having weekly grade-level meetings. The teachers meet as a team and talk through issues, follow up individually on certain children, and there are enough resources at the table so a teacher can get an answer for a certain child right then."

Students from Metropolitan State University in St. Paul and the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis serve as instructors in the extended-day programs.

"It's a great partnership," Collins said. "The [college] students are looking for quality urban education experience and their enthusiasm is unparalleled. They often come back on their own time to volunteer and go the extra mile in the program. Our plan is to turn each of the sites into a hub of college student activity. We want their excitement."

Each Achievement Plus school includes a Family Resource Center that provides family education nights, family reading hours, drop-in child care, English as a second language and GED classes, as well as referrals for housing, jobs and health insurance. Mental health therapists, nurse practitioners and a children's dental service are available at each school on a part-time basis.

Time is provided for reading every day.

"We have found that the kids really like having the time to read. And they love being read to. They get comfortable with the ritual and the routine of it," Wilson said.

"We have noticed the extra emphasis on reading is helping kids in the classroom. We also try to do as much writing as we can. We make it entirely non-judgmental. We just want them to put their arms around the letters."

Achievement Plus has a vision people can really get excited about, Wilson said.

"We are really doing something about school reform by integrating standards in afterschool programs. We are not just taking care of kids. We are creating a community school." ■ — YOST

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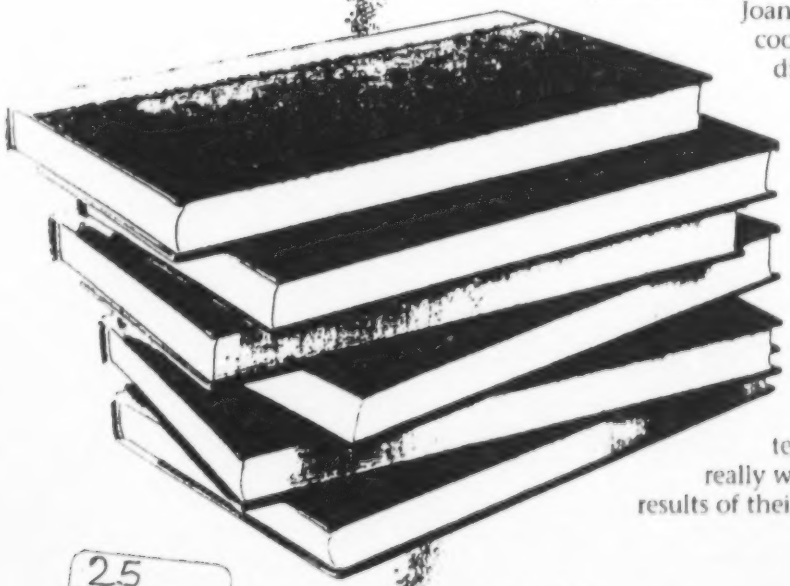
"We have found that the kids really like having the time to read.. And they love being read to. They get comfortable with the ritual and the routine of it."

—Terri Wilson

Middle school initiative targets literacy



INDEPENDENCE, Mo. — The Independence School District has been building a literacy improvement program for 15 years. With the help of a 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) initiative grant, afterschool programs at three middle school centers provide individualized reading help for the sixth, seventh and eighth grades.

While academics are the focus of the afterschool program, learning is not always pursued in traditional ways.

Joanie Hartnett, 21st CCLC coordinator for the school district, was walking around campus one day in late spring.

"I saw kids from the afterschool program swabbing the walls for specimens to use to culture bacteria," she said. "While I was glad they were learning scientific techniques, I did not really want to know the results of their experiment."

Freda Reynolds, a music teacher, is site coordinator at Bingham, the seventh-grade center. She teaches cooking, sewing, needlepoint and cross-stitch before and after school.

"The kids get hooked on the activities," she said. "I had a couple of boys from the regular school day who needed to serve detention with me. I offered them the chance to come in at 7:30 a.m. to serve it in my cooking class. They had such a good time they started coming back to the class on their own."

"The 21st CCLC grant was a godsend to us. Our families and kids are used to afterschool programs, and this provides instruction and supervision to another segment (or grade) of the population," District Superintendent Patricia Schumacher said.

"Literacy improvement is a challenge at the middle-school level. When we can get middle-school children to want to stay after school, to want to be part of an activity, that's powerful."

Middle-school attendance has increased, discipline referrals have declined, and academic achievement has risen since the program began.

"We started offering afterschool and

early childhood programs more than 15 years ago," Schumacher said.

"Literacy is critical. We start literacy training at birth with EvenStart [a federal program.] EvenStart is designed to help parents, specifically teen parents, get back to school to finish their educations, and to teach them good literacy skills to use in working with their baby."

Another district program called Parents as Teachers is available to any parent.

"We are trying to reach our population before they start their formal education at [age] 5. Independence School District now serves 82 percent of the preschool population," Schumacher said.

"The emphasis on literacy throughout the district has increased parental awareness about reading to their children. We took a survey, and 71 percent of the parents said they had read more to their children in the past year."

The 21st CCLC program has fit nicely into the district's focus on literacy and extra school day learning opportunities.

"In the middle school program, we target at-risk kids to stay after school to get tutoring help," Hartnett said. "We send contracts home to parents to let them know how their child is doing. We provide teachers for homework help."

The middle-school literacy effort depends largely on a CCC (Computer Curriculum Corporation) lab, a program that diagnoses and works with a child on 12 comprehension skills, Hartnett said.

"It is a software program that individualizes comprehension problems. It diagnoses and then reinforces the learning. The program allows 20 students to be working at their own pace and on areas that are specific to them.

"The schools already had the computers, so we purchased the software with 21st century funds. We saw about a two-grade level increase for kids who were already reading at a 2.5 grade level and above."

The kids are excited about their new skills, Hartnett said. She was touring the school with a newly assigned principal when a girl saw her and shouted out, "Ms. Hartnett! I was only at second-grade level before. Now I can read at fourth-grade level!"

In addition to academics, the afterschool program provides a drama club, basketball, volleyball, flag football, a golf program, art, modeling and self-esteem.

Program coordinators intend to bring classroom teachers and parents into the program in more significant ways in 2001-2002, Reynolds said.

Said Hartnett: "We now have a third of our students staying after school. The kids like having the teachers stay, too. What I have seen in the program is that students who are unsure of their relationships with adults, who have their defenses up, they have come around. When they see a teacher after school, they have a different relationship with that teacher."

"It's good for the teachers, too. They get to see the kids in a different, more positive light." ■ — YOST

"The 21st CCLC grant was a godsend to us. Our families and kids are used to afterschool programs, and this provides instruction and supervision to another segment (or grade) of the population."

—Patricia Schumacher

Literacy efforts boost scores, morale

SANTA FE, N.M. — An afterschool program that concentrated on building literacy and math skills, and English as a second language has succeeded in lifting Cesar Chavez Elementary School out of an at-risk category.

Cesar Chavez is a school with high immigration, mobility and monolingual Spanish-speaking families. It was designated by the state as a school that needed improvement, according to Carol Brito, executive director of the Executive Leadership Council for Youth and Education (ELC), a partner in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) initiative at four Santa Fe elementary schools.

ELC zeroed in on bringing in supplementary supports and services, providing a lot of support, including bilingual parent training for families. The school offered during and afterschool programs, evening programs, and even programs during school breaks. Test scores improved so much that it took the school out of the at-risk zone.

"What the 21st century program has brought to the schools is a way to see that all students, no matter what they come to school with, if they are given the right support and commitment from the community, can be successful," Brito said.

"We know it is a matter of committing resources to support families."

ELC is a collaboration of major institutions in Santa Fe.

"Our mission is to provide leadership to enable residents, agencies and institutions to become active partners with Santa Fe schools in addressing local needs through the principles of community schools," Brito said.

"We know that for learning to occur, one of the most important changes needed is in the family. If you don't have families

Reading provides a great opportunity for parents and children to spend time together.

engaged and involved and seeing school as a place that things can change for them, you are not going to get results."

In addition to the before and afterschool, evening, and summer programs, the community partners provide health services, including dental care, and technology instruction.

At Francis Xavier Nava Elementary School, coordinator Bill Rodriguez started a learning center with a weeklong program at spring break 2001.

"The parents were very appreciative to have a safe place for their children that involved fun and learning," he said.

The school has expanded its literacy component through theater arts.

"We have been doing mini-plays with the kids and this year we will start an afterschool drama club," Rodriguez said. "We plan to do a musical around Christmas time as part of the afterschool program."

He has brought in former Nava students who are now in high school to work with the children in afterschool and summer programs.

During the summer program, Jason Martinez, a junior from Santa Fe High School, taught fourth- and fifth-graders to write character profiles for a play, then memorize lines and become those characters. He said he was surprised at how much the youngsters could do.

"I basically taught them skills I had learned in theater classes at high school," Martinez said. "I had them act as though they had strings attached to their limbs and move like a marionette. I was surprised at how much they could do. I had thought kids couldn't dedicate themselves to a character. But they can, and they did."

But the focus of Nava's afterschool program has been tutoring, homework help, ESL classes and Spanish enrichment classes.

"The main thing we heard from teachers is that the kids are actually turning in their homework because they had a time and place to do it and a teacher to help out," Rodriguez said.

"One of programs we want to initiate this next year is a parent-student book club. We will meet with the children weekly and the parents monthly. Often children who don't read have not seen their parents reading. The key is to get the parents to read along with the children," he added.

The staff of Cesar Chavez began its community school initiative in 1998 with little funding.

"We took a community survey and residents said they wanted tutoring. So we started with that," said Jennifer Ortiz, community school coordinator of the afterschool program.

"Although money was tight, the passion from the teachers and the community was there. Then we got the 21st century grant and were able to open up the before and afterschool programs."

Recreational and arts activities are offered, but there is a strong academic focus. There is homework help in anything and everything.

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"We have adopted a diagnostic, prescriptive literacy program, and we offer it during the school day. The afterschool teachers continue to use it during the afterschool hours. It involves community volunteers, business partners, student mentors, computer programs and individualized portfolios to help accelerate learning," Ortiz said.

"We also use literacy games in both Spanish and English, including board and card games. About 40 percent of our students are monolingual Spanish. We know that it is important to provide them instruction in their home language."

Ortiz said program directors are working on more family literacy events, including the creation of a family backpack that contains literacy items, and a family library night. □

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